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CRITERIA FOR THE COMPARATIVE

ANALYSIS OF GENOCIDE

by

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The great difficulty in doing comparative research lies in knowing that to compare. My friend and collaborator is Frank Chalk, and we both have struggled with this problem since we started our work together about eight years ago. In looking at genocides from antiquity to the present time in all parts of the world it seemed to us of the utmost importance to find a way of classifying together those cases that have some important aspects in common. But which aspects are important? Clearly, this can be decided only by testing their use in an actual research project. We have experimented with several aspects, on the basis of which we have constructed and discarded several typologies. Other authors have struggled with the same problem.

One kind of typology deals with the nature of the societies in which genocides have occurred. The earliest of these was proposed by Jessie Bernard (1949) in her effort to develop a continuum of accommodation for racial and ethnic conflicts in the international community. This continuum ranges from amalgamation through co-operation, tolerance, and slavery to extermination of enemies and genocide. Since this scheme does not appear in later editions of her work, she must have decided that it was not contributing to her analysis. More recently, Irving Louis Horowitz (1980) has developed a continuum of modern societies. His key variable is the extent to which the state permits or represses dissent and the right to be different. His eight types range from genocidal to permissive societies.(p.44-5)

The weakness of these efforts lies in their tautological nature. That is: a society is assigned to a type or category on the basis of outcomes, not on the basis of characteristics that lead to a specified outcome. It is exactly this kind of perceived discrepancy between the character of a society and its actions

that led to the world-wide incredulity when the first news of the Final Solution became public. Such an outcome seemed at the time entirely incongruous because it was not in accord with expected behaviour; behaviour appropriate to a modern, western, developed society.

Most authors who have attempted to develop a typology of genocide have concentrated on isolating characteristics of genocide in the hope of elucidating the dynamics that led to this outcome. In our work, Frank Chalk and I have found that we also needed a new definition of genocide -- one based on the motives of the perpetrators. Our definition and typology have gone through several revisions, the latest (1987) of which follows:

GENOCIDE is a form of one-sided mass killing in which a state or other authority intends to destroy a group, as that group and membership in it are defined by the perpetrator. (1987, 30)

Our current typology classifies such genocides in terms of those committed in order:

1. to eliminate a real or potential threat;
2. to spread terror among real or potential enemies;
3. to acquire economic wealth; or
4. to implement a belief, a theory, or an ideology. (1987,39)

While this typology seems to work well in our research, it does ignore several dimensions which throw additional light on the comparisons of genocides from different periods of history and different regions of the world.

In this paper I propose to briefly examine some of these additional dimensions. While we do not plan to revise our typology at this time, it will be easy to see that one or several of these dimensions could become the base for another typology. Whether that would be a good research strategy would depend entirely on whether that would lead to new conclusions.

TYPES OF PERPETRATORS

Throughout history most genocides were committed by empires to eliminate a threat, to terrorize an enemy, or to acquire and keep wealth. Another way of putting this is to say that they were committed in the building and maintaining of empires. These types of genocides have become rare in the twentieth century. Our fourth type, committed to implement an ideology, has become

most frequent and seems to be associated with the rise of new regimes and/or states. (Larner, 1981) It would require a great deal of research to discover the nature of the link between the rise of the nation state and the increase in genocides. Is it a matter of imposing a new discipline on a recalcitrant population, or is it the enforced implementation of a new ideology? As will be seen, this dichotomy of empire versus nation state overlaps with some of the other dimensions below.

TYPES OF VICTIMS

In the first three types of genocides in our typology the victim groups were usually located outside the perpetrator society. This had significant effects on the genocidal process. Thus, it was not necessary to dehumanize the victim group. All societies have considered outsiders as less than equal or less than fully human. In our fourth type, and especially in the twentieth century, the victim groups have usually been found within the perpetrator society. It is this phenomenon that made it necessary first to identify the victim groups as separate from the larger society, and second to isolate and segregate them. This has to be done in such a way that the members of the perpetrator society accept the new definition; if they fail to do so, the genocide will also fail. The example of Hitler's euthanasia project serves as a good illustration of such a failure.

TYPES OF GROUPS

This base for constructing a typology has been much discussed ever since the U.N. Convention included four types of groups in its definition. Various authors have suggested the inclusion of economic and/or political and/or social groups. As shown above, our definition avoids this particular problem entirely by using the perpetrator's definition of the victim group. However, there is another important distinction to be considered: that is the distinction between real groups and pseudo-groups. The former are those that can be identified by an outside observer, while the latter can be identified only by the perpetrator. The outside observer can identify such groups only after the victim-

ization has started. The classical case here are the victims of the great witch-hunt, and a modern example is Stalin's persecution of the 'enemies of the people'.

This distinction is particularly relevant to efforts at prevention because the victim group can be identified by outsiders only after the victimization has been carried out.

TYPES OF ACCUSATIONS

Much has been written about the various reasons for persecution. There seems to be a close connection between the type of group that is being victimized and the type of offence that it is being accused of. The distinction that seems important here is whether the accusation is based on verifiable fact or whether it is a pseudo-accusation that has no reality outside the frame of reference of the perpetrator. Thus, heretics usually did not deny their deviant beliefs while witches confessed to conspiracy with the devil only under torture.

In the context of genocide it is necessary to make a clear distinction between individual and collective guilt. While confessions may be extracted from individuals, the perpetrator always victimizes a group that is accused of collective guilt. Therefore, the confession to be extracted placed little emphasis on what the victim had done and focused mainly on extracting the identities of the co-conspirators, that is, the members of the group.

TYPES OF RESULTS FOR THE PERPETRATOR SOCIETY

There is a great deal of literature that deals with the results of genocide for the victims, but very little that deals with the results for the perpetrators. For those of us who have an interest in prediction and prevention this should be a serious issue because it might lead to avenues of preventive action.

Historically, the results for the perpetrator society seems to be directly related to their motives. Genocides committed to eliminate threats, to spread terror, or to acquire wealth are motivated by concrete situations. To the extent that these situations are perceived as pressing problems by the perpetrator state, successful genocides eliminate the problem and materially enrich

the perpetrator. That is, the threatening group is eliminated, or terrorized into subservience, and/or the economic wealth is in fact acquired. In ideological genocide, however, the motive is much more abstract: it may be to enforce conformity, to purify the race, to legitimate a new regime, or to homogenize a nation state. Such abstract motives are much harder to realize and the resulting abstract benefits have no direct relation to material costs. This seems to account for the historical fact that such ideological genocides are always carried out at tremendous costs to the perpetrator society -- notwithstanding the fact that individuals may have enriched themselves.

It should be emphasized that any typology must be evaluated in terms of the results it aids in producing. Clearly, the most important results would be those that help us to predict and prevent genocides in the future.

Some of our friendly critics have suggested several other bases for typologies that ought to be considered. The one most frequently mentioned is the scale of casualties. Regardless of whether this is done in numbers or in percentages, it has not been shown that any meaningful research results would be arrived at by using this method. Similarly, it has been suggested that the method of killing and its technological sophistication or the organizational complexity of such operations might be treated as important variables. However, it seems doubtful that these aspects would yield anything beyond descriptive categories. This is not meant to be a flippant statement; it merely reflects a conviction that the major reason for doing comparative research on genocides is the hope of preventing them in the future. Such prevention will pose difficult applied problems, but first it must be based on an understanding of the social situations and the social structures and processes that are likely to lead to genocides. Only with such knowledge can we begin to predict the likely occurrence of genocides and direct our efforts toward prevention. In what exactly such efforts at prevention might consist will hopefully be discussed during these workshops.